

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 COLOMB 06159 181126Z

46

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04

NSAE-00 SIL-01 IO-11 AID-05 OMB-01 OC-05 CCO-00

ACDA-05 DHA-02 FRB-03 USIA-06 TRSE-00 XMB-02 OPIC-03

SP-02 CIEP-01 NSC-05 SS-15 STR-04 CEA-01 PM-04 L-03

H-02 DODE-00 PA-01 PRS-01 /112 W

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R 181053Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4261

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3.O. 11652:N/A

LBAGS: ELAB, PINT, CE

SUBJECT: LABOR UNREST INCREASES

1. SUMMARY: JOINT COMMITTEE OF TRADE UNION ORGANIZATIONS (JCTUO) HAS SCHEDULED ONE-DAY TOKEN STRIKE FEBRUARY 20. STRIKE IS TO PROTEST GOVERNMENT HANDLING OF ON-GOING WORK-STOPPAGE AT GOVERNMENT PRESS WHERE NEW WORKERS ARE BEING HIRED TO REPLACE STRIKERS. LABOR WING OF RULING SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY HAS ANNOUNCED ITS SUPPORT FOR TOKEN STRIKE. THIS GENERAL STRIKE IS IN CONTEXT OF SPORADIC PUBLIC-SECTOR STRIKES IN PAST MONTHS OVER VARIOUS LOCALLY-IMPORTANT BREAD AND BUTTER ISSUES. END SUMMARY.

2. JOINT COMMITTEE OF TRADE UNION ORGANIZATIONS (JCTUO) HAS CALLED TOKEN STRIKE FOR FEBRUARY 20 IN PROTEST AGAINST GOVERNMENT TREATMENT OF STRIKING WORKERS AT GOVERNMENT PRESS. JCTUO, CONFEDERATION OF UNIONS AFFILIATED TO RULING UNITED FRONT MEMBERS SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY (SLFP) AND COMMUNIST PARTY (LSSP), AND TO EX-UF MEMBER LANKA SAMA SSMAJA PARTY HAS BEEN SHAKY ALLIANCE

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PAGE 02 COLOMB 06159 181126Z

SINCE SEPTEMBER 1975 OUTSTER OF LSSP FROM GOVERNMENT.

JCTUO'S TRADITIONAL MILITANCE WHICH HAD BEEN TAMED BY ITS TIES TO GOVERNMENT HAS BEGUN TO REASSERT ITSELF UNDER PRESSURE FROM LSSP, NOW IN OPPOSITION, WHOLSE UNIONS STILL BACKBONE OF JCTUO.

3. FORTHCOMING TOKEN STRIKE IS NOTEWORTHY BECAUSE SLFP TRADE UNION FEDERATION--USUALLY LESS THAN ENTHUSIASTIC ABOT ANTI-GOVERNMENT ACTIONS--HAS PLEDGED SUPPORT. THIS WOULD INDICATE THAT SLFP LEADERS HAVE ASSURANCE THAT STRIKE WILL INDEED BE "TOKEN" AND NOT BEGINNING OF MASS LABOR AGITATION THAT SOME FEEL IS EVENTUAL LSSP GOAL.

4. ORIGINAL STRIKE AT GOVERNMENT PRESS BEGAN OVER LAYOFF OF ONE EMPLOYEE BUT MINISTRY OF INFORMATIONAND BROADCASTING HAS TAKEN HARD LINE AND LASTWEEK BEGAN HIRING NEW WORKERS TO REPLACE STRIKERS. THIS HAS ANGERED UNIONS OF ALL IDEOLOGICAL STRIPES.

5. LEADING UP TO THIS PROPOSED ONE-DAY GENERAL STRIKE HAVE BEEN SPORADIC LABOR INCIDENTS OVER PAST MONTH, PRIMARILY IN PUBLIC SECTOR UNITS WITH HEAVY LEFTIST UNION REPRESENTATION. LARGE GOVERNMENT SUPPLIES FACTORY AT KOLANNAWA IS APPARENTLY CURRENTLY IN THE MIDST OF STRIKE UNREPORTED IN PRESS. RAILWAY WAS SHUT DOWN ALMOST COMPLETELY FOR THREE DAYS IN JANUARY. COLOMBO PORT HAS HAD SPORADIC WORK STOPPAGES SOME OF WHICH HAVE SPREAD TO TRINCOMALEE AND GALLE. LARGE TEXTILE FIRM AND TOURIST HOTEL HAVE ALSO BEEN STRUCK IN RECENT MONTHS. SUCH STRIKES APPEAR TO STEM FROM BREAD AND BUTTER ECONOMIC ISSUES--BONUSES, PERSONNEL LAYOFFS, ETC.--RATHER THAN BEING IDEOLOGICALLY INSPIRED.

6. COMMENT: LSSP ATTRIBUTES THESE RUMBLINGS TO RISING WORKER DISCONTENT. IT APPEARS THAT THESE ARE MORE IN NATURE OF LOCALLY-INSPIRED STRIKES WHICH WERE FORMERLY BUT NO LONGER DISCOURAGED BY LSSP IN NAME OF UNITED FRONT UNITY.

VAN HOLLEN

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